

# The Yukon Trail

Copyright, William Macleod Raine.

## An Alaskan Love Story

By William Macleod Raine

### MACDONALD WINS FIRST MOVE IN BATTLE WITH ELLIOT FOR SHEBA'S FAVOR

**Synopsis.**—As a representative of the government Gordon Elliot is on his way to Alaska to investigate coal claims. On the boat he meets and becomes interested in a fellow passenger whom he learns is Sheba O'Neill, also "going in." Colby Macdonald, active head of the land-grabbing syndicate under investigation, comes aboard. Elliot and Macdonald become in a measure friendly. Landing at Kus'ak, Elliot finds that old friends of his, Mr. and Mrs. Paget, are the people whom Sheba has come to visit. Mrs. Paget is Sheba's cousin. At dinner Elliot reveals to Macdonald the object of his coming to Alaska. The two men, naturally antagonistic, now also become rivals for the hand of Sheba. Macdonald, foreseeing failure of his financial plans if Elliot learns the facts, sends Selfridge, his right-hand man, to Kamatlah to arrange matters so that Elliot will be deceived as to the true situation. Elliot also leaves for Kamatlah and, wandering from the trail, believes that he faces death. Selfridge, on his arrival at Kamatlah, has his agents abduct Gideon Holt, old-time miner, who knows too much about Macdonald's activities. Elliot wanders into the camp where Holt is held a prisoner. The two men, overpowering the kidnappers, return to Kamatlah, where Elliot learns the truth about the coal land deals.

#### CHAPTER X—Continued.

Elliot glanced at the woman behind whose skirts the youngster was hiding. "She's not bad looking, if that's what you mean," he said after they had taken up the trail again.

"You ain't the only white man that has thought that," retorted the old miner significantly.

"No?" Gordon had learned to let Holt tell things at his leisure. It usually took less time than to try to hurry him.

"Name of the kid mean anything to you?"

"Can't say it did."

"H'm! Named for his dad. First syllable of each of his names."

The land inspector stopped in his stride and wheeled upon Holt. "You don't mean Colby Macdonald?"

"Why don't I?"

"But—Good Lord, he isn't a squaw man, is he?"

"Not in the usual meaning of the word. She never cooked and kept house for him. Just the same, little Colmac is his kid. Couldn't you see it sticking out all over him? He's the spit 'n' image of his dad."

"I see it now, you're pointed it out. I was trying to think who he reminded me of. Of course it was Macdonald."

"Mac met up with Meteeuse when he first scouted this country for coal five years ago. So far's I know he was square enough with the girl. She never claimed he made any promises or anything like that. He sends a check down once a quarter to the trader here for her and the kid."

But young Elliot was not thinking about Meteeuse. His mind's eye saw another picture—the girl at Kus'ak, listening spellbound to the tales of a man whose actions translated romance into life for her, a girl swept from the quiet backwaters of an Irish village to this land of the midnight sun with its amazing contrasts.

And all the way up on the boat she continued to fill his mind. The slowness of the steamer fretted him. Sometimes the jealousy in his heart flamed up like a prairie fire when it comes to a brush heap. The outrage of it set him blazing with indignation. It was no less than a conspiracy. What



Elliot Glanced at the Woman.

could an innocent young girl like Sheba know of such a man as Colby Macdonald? Her imagination conceived, no doubt, an idealized vision of him. But the real man was clear outside her ken.

Gordon set his jaw grimly. He would have it out with Diane. He would let her see she was not going to have it all her own way. By heaven, he would put a spoke in her wheel.

He was on fire to come to his journey's end. No sooner had he reached his hotel than he called up Mrs. Paget. Quite clearly she understood that he

wanted an invitation to dinner. Yet she hesitated.

"My 'phone can't be working well," Gordon told her gayly. "You must have asked me to dinner, but I didn't just hear it. Never mind. I'll be there. Seven o'clock, did you say?"

Diane laughed. "You're just as much a boy as you were ten years ago, Gord. All right. Come along. But you're to leave at ten."

"No, I can't hear that. My 'phone has gone bad again. And if I had heard, I shouldn't think of doing anything so ridiculous as leaving at that hour. It would be an insult to your hospitality. I know when I'm well off."

"Then I'll have to withdraw my invitation. Perhaps some other day—"

"I'll leave at ten," promised Elliot meekly.

He could almost hear the smile in her voice as she answered. "Very well. Seven sharp. I'll explain about the curfew limit some time."

Macdonald was with Miss O'Neill in the living room when Gordon arrived at the Paget home.

Sheba came forward to greet the new guest. The welcome in her eyes was very genuine.

"You and Mr. Macdonald know each other, of course," she said after her handshake.

The Scotsman nodded his lean, grizzled head, looking straight into the eyes of the field agent.

"Yes, I know Mr. Elliot—now. I'm not sure that he knows me—yet."

"I'm beginning to know you rather well, Mr. Macdonald," answered Gordon quietly.

If the Alaskan wanted to declare war he was ready for it. The field agent knew that Selfridge had kept reports detailing what had happened at Kamatlah. Up to date Macdonald had offered him the velvet glove. He wondered if the time had come when the fist of steel was to be doubled.

"Did you have a successful trip, Mr. Elliot?" asked Sheba innocently.

Paget grinned behind his hand. The girl's question was like a match to powder, and everyone in the room knew it but she. The engineer's interests and his convictions were on the side of Macdonald, but he recognized that Elliot had been sent in to gather facts for the government and not to give advice to it.

"Did you, Gordon?" echoed his hostess.

"I think so," he answered quietly. "I hear you put up with old Gideon Holt. Is he as cracked as he used to be?" asked Macdonald.

"Was he cracked when you used to know him on Frenchman creek?" countered the young man.

Macdonald shot a quick, slant look at him. The old man had been talking, had he?

"He was cracked and broke, too," laughed the mine owner hardily. "Cracked when he came, broke when he left."

"Yes, that was one of the stories he told me," Gordon turned to Sheba. "You should meet the old man, Miss O'Neill. He knew your father at Dawson and on Bonanza."

The girl was all eagerness. "Td like to. Does he ever come to Kus'ak?"

"Nonsense!" cut in Diane sharply. She flashed Gordon a look of annoyance. "He's nothing but a daft old idiot, my dear."

The dinner had started wrong, and though Paget steered the conversation to safer ground, it did not go very well.

Gordon was ashamed of himself. He could not quite have told what were the impulses that had moved him to carry the war into the camp of the enemy. Perhaps, more than anything else, it had been a certain look of quiet assurance in the eyes of his rival when he looked at Sheba.

He rose promptly at ten. "Must you go so soon?" Diane asked. She was smiling at him with bland mockery.

"I really must," answered Elliot. His hostess followed him into the hall. She watched him get into his coat before saying what was on her mind.

"What did you mean by telling Sheba

that old Holt knew her father? What is he to tell her if they meet—that her father died of pneumonia brought on by drink? Is that what you want?"

"I suppose I wanted Holt to tell her that Macdonald robbed her father and indirectly was the cause of his death."

"Absurd!" exploded Diane. "You're so simple that you accept as truth the gossip of every crack-brained idiot when it suits your purpose."

He smiled, boyishly, engagingly, as he held out his hand. "Don't let's quarrel, Di. I admit I forgot myself."

"All right. We won't. But don't believe all the catty talk you hear, Gordon."

"I'll try to believe only the truth," He smiled, a little ruefully. "And it isn't necessary for you to explain why the curfew law applies to me and not to Macdonald."

She was on her dignity at once. "You're quite right. It isn't necessary. But I'm going to tell you, anyhow. Mr. Macdonald is going away tomorrow for two or three days, and he has some business he wants to talk over with Sheba. He had made an appointment with her, and I didn't think it fair to let your coming interfere with it."

Gordon took this facet with his smile still working.

"I've got a little business I want to talk over with you, Di."

She had always been a young woman of rather a hard finish. Now she met him fairly, eye to eye. "Any time you like, Gordon."

Elliot carried away with him one very definite impression. Diane intended Sheba to marry Macdonald if she could bring it about. She had as good as served notice on him that the girl was spoken for.

The young man set his square jaw. Diane was used to having her own way. So was Macdonald. Well, the Elliots had a will of their own, too.

#### CHAPTER XI.

##### Sheba Says "Perhaps."

Obedient the orders of the general in command, Peter took himself to his den with the excuse that he had blueprints to work over. Presently Diane said she thought she heard one of the children crying and left to investigate.

The Scotsman strode to the fireplace and stood looking down into the glowing coals. He seemed in no hurry to break the silence and Sheba glanced at his strong brooding face a little apprehensively. She knew of only one subject that would call for so formal a private talk between her and Macdonald, and any discussion of this she would very much have liked to postpone.

He turned from the fire to Sheba. It was characteristic of him that he plunged straight at what he wanted to say.

"I've asked to see you alone, Miss O'Neill, because I want to make a confession and restitution—to begin with," he told her abruptly.

She had a sense of suddenly stilled pulses. "That sounds very serious," The young woman smiled faintly.

His face of chiseled granite masked all emotion. It kept under lock and key the insurgent impulses that moved him when he looked into the blue eyes charged with reserve. Back of them, he felt, was the mystery of purity, of maidenhood. He longed to know her better, to find out and to appropriate for himself the woman that lay behind the fine veil of flesh. She seemed to him delicate as a flame and as vivid. There would come a day when her innocent, passionate nature would respond to the love of a man as a waiting harp does to skillful fingers.

"My story goes away back to the Klondike days. I told you that I knew your father on Frenchman creek, but I didn't say much about knowing him on Bonanza."

"Mr. Strong has told me something about the days on Bonanza, and I know you would tell me more some day—when you wanted to speak about it."

"Your father was among the first of those who stampeded to Bonanza. He and Strong took a claim together. I bought out the interest of your father."

"You told me that."

His masterful eyes fastened to hers. "I didn't tell you that I took advantage of him. He was—not well. I used that against him in the bargaining. He wanted ready money, and I tempted him."

"Do you mean that you—wronged him?"

"Yes, I cheated him." He resolved to gloss over nothing, to offer no excuses. "I didn't know there was gold in the claim, but I had what we call a hunch. I took the claim without giving value received."

"But—I don't understand." Her brave, steady eyes looked directly into those of Macdonald. "If he felt you had—done him a wrong—why did he come to you when he was ill?"

"He was coming to demand justice of me. On the way he suffered exposure and caught pneumonia. The word reached us, and Strong and I brought him to our cabin."

"You faced a blizzard to bring him in. Mr. Strong told me how you risked your life by carrying him through the storm—how you wouldn't give up and leave him though you

were weak and staggering yourself. He says it was a miracle you ever got through."

"I'm not heartless," said Macdonald impatiently. "Of course I did that. I had to do it. I couldn't do less."

"Nor more," she suggested. "You may have made a hard bargain with him, but you wiped that out later."

"That's just what I didn't do. Don't think my conscience is troubling me. I'm not such a mush-brained fool. If it had not been for you I would never have thought of it again. But you are his daughter. What I cheated him out of belongs to you—and you are my friend."

"Don't use that word about what you did, please. He wasn't a child. If you got the best of him in a bargain, I don't think father would think of it that way."

The difficulty was that he could not tell her the truth about her father's



"It Belongs to You—and You're Going to Take It."

weakness for drink and how he had played upon it. He bridged all explanations and passed to the thing he meant to do in reparation.

"The money I cleaned up from that claim belongs to you, Miss O'Neill. You will oblige me by taking it."

From his pocket he took a folded paper and handed it to her. Sheba opened it doubtfully. The paper contained a typewritten statement and to it was attached a check by means of a clip. The check was made out to her and signed by Colby Macdonald. The amount it called for was \$183,431.

"Oh, I couldn't take this, Mr. Macdonald—I couldn't. It doesn't belong to me," she cried.

"It belongs to you—and you're going to take it."

"I wouldn't know what to do with so much."

"The bank will take care of it for you until you decide. So that's settled." He passed definitely from the subject. "There's something else I want to say to you, Miss O'Neill."

Some change in his voice warned her. The girl slanted a quick, shy glance at him.

"I want to know if you'll marry me, Miss O'Neill," he shot at her abruptly. Then, without giving her time to answer, he pushed on: "I'm older than you—by twenty-five years. Always I've lived on the frontiers. I've had to take the world by the throat and shake from it what I wanted. So I've grown hard and willful. All the sweet, fine things of life I've missed. But with you beside me, I'm not too old to find them yet—if you'll show me the way, Sheba."

A wave of color swept into her face, but her eyes never faltered from his. "I'm not quite sure," she said in a low voice.

"You mean—whether you love me?" She nodded. "I—admire you more than any man I ever met. You are a great man, strong and powerful—and I am so insignificant beside you. I—am drawn to you—so much. But—I am not sure."

"I'm going away for two days. Perhaps when I come back you will know, Sheba. Take your time. Marriage is a serious business. I want you to remember that my life has been very different from yours. You'll hear all sorts of things about me. Some of them are true. There is this difference between a man and a good woman. He fights and falls and fights again and wins. But a good woman is finer. She has never known the failure that drags one through slime and mud. Her goodness is born in her; she doesn't have to fight for it."

The girl smiled a little tremulously. "Doesn't she? We're not all angels, you know."

"I hope you're not. There will need to be a lot of the human in you to make allowances for Colby Macdonald," he replied with an answering smile.

When he said good-by it was with a warm, strong handshake.

"I'll be back in two days. Perhaps you'll have good news for me then," he suggested.

The dark, silken lashes of her eyes lifted shyly to meet his.

"Perhaps," she said.

During the absence of Macdonald the field agent saw less of Sheba than he had expected, and when he did see her she had an abstracted manner he did not quite understand. She kept to her own room a good deal, except when she took long walks into the hills back of the town. Diane had a shrewd idea that the Alaskan had put his fortune to the test, and she not only let her cousin alone herself, but fended Gordon from her ardently.

The third day after the dinner Elliot dropped around to the Pagets with intent to get Sheba into a set of tennis. Diane sat on the porch darning socks.

"Sheba is out walking with Mr. Macdonald," she explained in answer to a question as to the whereabouts of her guest.

"Oh, he's back, is he?" remarked Gordon moodily.

"He came back this morning. Sheba has gone up with him to see the Lucky Strike."

"You're going to marry her to that man if you can, aren't you?" he charged.

"If I can, Gordon." She slipped a darning ball into one of little Peter's stockings and placidly trimmed the hole.

"It's what I call a conspiracy."

"Is it?" Diane smiled. Gordon understood her smile to mean he was jealous.

"Maybe I am. That's not the point," he answered, just as if she had made her accusation in words.

"Suppose you tell me what the point is," she suggested.

"He isn't good enough for her. You know that perfectly well."

"Good enough!" She shrugged her shoulders. "What man is good enough for a nice girl, if you come to that? There are other things besides sugary goodness. Any man who is strong can make himself good enough for the woman he loves."

"Generally speaking, yes. But Colby Macdonald is different."

"Thank heaven he is," she retorted impatiently. Then added after a moment: "He isn't a Sunday-school superintendent if that's what you mean."

"That isn't what I mean at all. But there's such a thing as a difference between right and wrong, isn't there?"

"Oh, yes. For instance, Mr. Macdonald is right about the need of developing Alaska and the way to do it, and you are wrong."

"I'm not talking about essential right and wrong. Miss O'Neill is idealizing Macdonald. I don't suppose you've told her, for instance, that he made his first money in the North running a dance hall."

"No, I haven't told her any such thing, because it isn't true," she replied scornfully. "He owned an opera house and brought in a company of players. I dare say they danced. That's very different, as you'd know if you didn't have stigmatism of the mind."

"Not the way the story was told me. But let that pass. Does she know that Macdonald beat her father out of one of the best claims on Bonanza and was indirectly responsible for his death?"

"What's the use of talking nonsense, Gordon. You know you can't prove that," his friend told him sharply.

"I think I can—if it is necessary."

Diane looked across at him with an impatient little tilt of the chin. "I don't think I like you as well as I used to."

"Sorry, because I'd like you just as well, Diane, if you would stop trying to manage your cousin into a marriage that will spoil her life," he answered gravely. "The happiness of Miss O'Neill is of very great importance to me."

"Do you mean—?" Wide-eyed, she looked her question straight at him.

"That's just what I mean, Diane."

She darted for a minute in silence. It had occurred to Diane before that perhaps Gordon might be in love with Sheba, but she had put the thought from her because she did not want to believe it.

"That's different, Gordon. It explains—and in a way excuses—your coming here and trying to bully me." She stopped her work to flash a question at him. "Don't you think that maybe it's only a fancy of yours? I remember you used—"

He shook his head. "No chance, Diane. I'm hard hit. She's the only girl I ever met that suited me. Everything she does is right. Every move she makes is wonderful."

The eyes with which she looked at him were softer, as those of women are wont to be for the true romance.

"You poor boy," she murmured, and let her hand for a moment rest on his.

"Meaning that I lose?" he asked quickly.

"I think you do. I'm not sure."

Elliot leaned forward impulsively. "Be a good sport, Diane. Let me have my chance, too. Why do you make it easy for Macdonald and hard for

me? Isn't it because the glamor of his millions blinds you?"

"He's a big, splendid man, but I don't like him any the less because he has the power to make life easy and comfortable for Sheba," she defended sturdily.

"Yet you turned down Arthur West, the best catch in your set, to marry Peter, who was the worst," he reminded her. "Have you ever been sorry for it?"

She resorted to the previous question. "Sheba knows more about Mr. Macdonald than you think. And about how he got her father's claim, for instance—she has heard all that."

"You told her?"

"No. Colby Macdonald told her. He said he practically robbed her father, and he gave her a check for nearly two hundred thousand to cover the cleanup from the claim and interest."

"Bully for him." On the heel of this he flung a question at her. "Did Macdonald ask her to marry him the night of the dinner?"

A flash of whimsical amusement lit her dainty face. "You'd better ask him that. Here he comes now."

They were coming down the walk together, Macdonald and Sheba. The young woman was absorbed in his talk, and she did not know that her cousin and Elliot were on the porch until she was close upon them. But at sight of the young man her eyes became warm and kind.

"I'm sorry I was out yesterday when you called," she told him.

"And you were out again today. My luck isn't very good, is it?"

He laughed pleasantly, but his heart was bitter. He believed Macdonald had won.

"We've had such a good walk," Sheba went on quickly. "I wish you could have heard Mr. Macdonald telling me how he had a chance to save a small Eskimo tribe during a hard winter. He carried food five hundred miles to them. It was a thrilling experience."

"Mr. Macdonald has had a lot of very interesting experiences. You must get him to tell you about all of them," answered Gordon quietly.

The eyes of the two men met. The steel-gray ones of the older man answered the challenge of his rival with a long, steady look. There was in it something of triumph, something of scornful insolence. If this young fellow wanted war, he did not need to wait long for it.

"Time enough for that, man. Miss O'Neill and I have the whole Arctic winter before us for stories."

The muscles in the lean jaws of Gordon Elliot stood out like steel ropes. He turned to Sheba. "Am I to congratulate Mr. Macdonald?"

The color in her cheeks grew warmer, but her shy glance met his fairly. "I think it is I that am to be congratulated, Mr. Elliot."

Diane took her cousin in her arms. "My dear, I wish you all the happiness in the world," she said softly.

The Irish girl fled into the house as soon as she could, but not before making an announcement.

"We're to be married soon, very quietly. If you are still at Kus'ak we want you to be one of the few friends present, Mr. Elliot."

Macdonald backed her invitation with a cool, cynical smile. "Miss O'Neill speaks for us both, of course, Elliot."

The defeated man bowed. "Thanks very much. The chances are that I'll be through my business before then."

As soon as his fiancée had gone into the house, the Scotsman left. Gordon



"Am I to Congratulate Mr. Macdonald?"

sat down in a porch chair and stared straight in front of him. The suddenness of the news had brought his world tumbling about his ears. He felt that such a marriage would be an outrage against Sheba's innocence.

Though she was sorry for him, Diane did not think it best to say so yet.

Genevieve Mallory, seeing Macdonald slipping from her grasp, takes a hand in the game with results not exactly pleasant for Macdonald. How she pulled the wires from behind the scenes is told in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)